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PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Letter from Taizé

Preparing for the world-wide Council of Youth

The Prior of Taizé writes to you :

The essence of things is ever concealed from our eyes... and this sustains increasingly the ardour of our search, leading us on towards the unique reality. That too is part of the interior adventure and we shall not leave it aside, even when, in two years time, we set out on the public adventure of the worldwide Council of Youth that we shall live for mankind.

Why make the two adventures coincide ? Because every man, not knowing much about what he bears within himself, is in fact composed of complex realities : the thirst to create is one, but there is also anxiety, moral suffering... if these realities of our humanity are to be transfigured in us, that presupposes our going to a source, the risen Christ. Then, they can make it possible for us to discover who the other person really is, they kindle in us a passion for man, and for man's liberation.

Roger, your brother

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AT TAIZÉ

The next meetings in the preparation of the Council of Youth

As was announced at Easter, the meetings taking place at Taizé this year have been completely reorganised.

While everyone comes together for the moments of common prayer, during each week there are several parallel meetings taking place simultaneously : one meeting involving silence, retreat ; other meetings for people just beginning to take part in the preparation of the Council of Youth ; and others for those who have previously taken part in other meetings and who now want to go further.

The Summer meetings will run, every week, from the Monday evening to the following Sunday midday, from June 26th to September 10th (and a week of work to prepare everything for the meetings from June 20th to 26th). Those wanting to help with all the different tasks involved in running each weeks meeting are asked to arrive at Taizé by the preceding Friday at 7pm, having first written to us.

The age limit is fixed : from 18 to 29 years of age. Costs are left to each person's discretion (the suggested price : 9.- francs per day, 2 US dollars, 70p UK).

Remember that by writing to announce your arrival, you will help the work of the reception teams, of the kitchen, etc. If you need more registration forms *than the one from the last* Letter from Taizé, *you have only to write to us. Groups are asked to send one form for each member.*

For the USA : a contribution of 2 dollars is requested from those who receive the *Letter from Taizé* to cover publication expenses and postage :
Letter from Taizé
2150 Almaden Road, 114 — San Jose, Calif. 95125. USA

Everywhere, young people find themselves confronting barriers : social and political divisions, fear, lack of understanding between men. And everywhere they are searching for ways of overcoming them. There are echoes of this search in all the letters arriving from those who are travelling, whether it be in Asia, in Africa or in Latin America. Cells have gone, all over the world, to share something of what other young people are looking for and, reading what the members of these cells write, it is striking to see that with different situations, in different countries, the questions are asked in the same way.

When the aim is to travel in order to share all that is being prepared with a view to the Council of Youth and to search further with the young people encountered on the journey, the essential is to live with them, to listen, to discover and be discovered.

NOTES ON A JOURNEY THROUGH LATIN AMERICA

From one country to another

In *Uruguay*, what do we talk about with the young people we meet ? We are from Brazil, the powerful neighbour, and we are coming to a country with a higher cultural level. Many questions are asked on a level of information : the countries are neighbours but know little about one another. News travels badly across Latin America and the mail is very inefficient. Every country is turned more towards Europe than to the country next door. When we share something of the preparation of the Council of Youth in the five countries that we visited, we often tell of one experience in Brazil : there one way of putting the « Joyful News » into practice has been to provoke more contacts between the youth of the cities and those living upstate. And it is natural to extend that to provoking more contacts between the youth of the different countries of Latin America.

In *Chili* we visit two « reductions » (Indian collective holdings) that had little by little been eaten away by the incursions of colonisers coming from Europe and that the

Indians are now winning back by force. Visiting the first to re-occupy its land, we are received by the president : very poor, about forty years old. He takes us to the upper floor of his home, so we have to cross the whole house. It is without furniture : no tables, no beds, no cupboards ; nothing. We sit on a plank on the ground, he remains standing before us and explains their situation. And as he begins to talk, the emotion is too strong and this solid peasant is obliged to turn away to hide his tears. In actual fact the struggle of the Indians, the oldest inhabitants of Chili, has scarcely begun. Once they have won back their lands they have to learn how to work them so as to survive in present-day society. It will be a long process, not only because of their present material poverty but even more because of the interior destruction of the human being that is the result of colonisation, in which man is dominated and exploited by his fellow men.

Arriving in Lima, *Peru*, we visit two youth groups, one in a middle-class district, the other in a shanty-town. There are some 300 similar groups in Lima, with contacts all over the country. Their activities are of two kinds : either « neighbourhood promotion » or days of reflexion. One such series of days would involve anything up to 1000 young people meeting every evening for a week. A week of that kind is prepared over a long period and only happens once a year in any given district. The young people themselves find the necessary funds.

As soon as we pass from Peru to *Bolivia*, we can see confirmed what the statistics had already told us : Bolivia is the poorest country of Latin America, much poorer than the Brazilian North-East. The journey is unpleasant, in old buses on roads without tarmac. In Bolivia, except for the four or five towns having over 100.000 inhabitants, there are no roads, no electric light, nor any of the thousand other technical means of modern living. It is easy to see why about one third of all Bolivians live outside of their country — the intellectuals and technicians in the rich countries, the simple people mainly in Argentina.

« Liberation »

Many Latin American christians find common ground around the theme « liberation ». Having spent two months talking to groups of young people, we wonder if one basic theme might not rather be : « how to live as christians in a totalitarian regime ? » since Cuban-style revolutions are highly unlikely to happen in the foreseeable future, and the prospect is rather a continuation of military regimes.

Why all these military regimes in Latin America ? Why this tendency towards totalitarianism ? It is possible, leaving aside the important differences that exist between the different countries, to reply schematically. Previously, the Latin American countries were exporters of raw materials, either from agriculture of from mining. These sales enriched a small number of land owners and international merchants. But today they are an insufficient source of revenue. Besides, there has been a certain degree of industrialisation. This nation-based industry, after a first, rapid growth allowing it to replace a number of simple manufactured items hitherto imported, is subject to two kinds of pressure : the one coming from the demands of those working there, the other from international industries. It is at this point that the armed forces seize power, they being the only organised social body (where there are syndicates, the army has the advantage of armed force). Once in power, the military regimes favour industry by stifling all social claims and by regulating relations with foreign industry. In return, it is industry that supplies the money for the regime. When the military intervention is accompanied by a programme, as in Brazil or Peru, its action can be effective. In these cases the State tends to exercise a wide control over the economy. When in the probably very distant future power returns into the hands of the civilian population, it will lie in the hands of the new industrialist class, city-dwelling, supported by an electorate composed of the middle classes that will have grown up through this process of change.

Youth in Latin America

A few remarks on the different christian youth movements :

1) Traditional movements such as Catholic Action and the University Parish are dropping off. They are now only tiny groups, very strongly politicised.

2) Spiritual movements (« cursillos », etc.) have a large following. In some respects they are related to « moral rearmament », including in their more or less abstentionist attitude towards political questions.

3) In Chili we encountered a third style of movement, scarcely found elsewhere, and hard to characterise. Its intention is to work with young people without having any preconceived methods, the aim being to bring them to express themselves in their own cultural terms and in terms of their own local situations. Large-scale gatherings alternate with work done in small groups.

At Santiago, Chili, at a meeting with leaders of different youth movements, one offered this analysis : « Here in Chili the christian youth movements awaken the youth, give it a motivation and increased knowledge. But when the fruit is ready, opening into responsible action, then it is others who profit, especially the political parties ». This expresses briefly the drama of many young Latin Americans.

One priest tells us that at the present time only 2 % of the young people in Chili are interested enough in political parties to become registered members of one. He explains to us that he tries to find and express something new so as to enter into a dialogue with young people. That « something new » goes in the direction of thinking and acting « politically » in the sense of a concern for public matters, beginning with the immediate neighbourhood, but without any affiliation with the parties. One of

the most important things that the young people of his district are finding out is that the political parties make use of them and set them against one another.

The widespread popular image of a highly revolutionary youth in all Latin America is false. « Che » is better known in Europe than in Latin America. This means that, often, young Latino-Americans studying in Europe constitute an exception in this respect. Taking young people here as a whole, they are subdued and accept the social order inherited from their parents ; at the same time, like their parents, they suffer a sense of frustration at so many desires remaining unsatisfied. Even at the University of Chili, where political activities can have free run, there are only 24 % of the boys and 6 % of the girls militantly involved in a political group. As for Chilian youth as a whole, with only 2 % belonging to a political party, that percentage is still much higher than in the other countries we have visited. In all these countries about 50 % of the young population lives in rural areas or emigrates to a shanty-town. In a sense these young people have no youth : early in life they have to provide for themselves if they are to survive. This they try to do as their parents did — where would they get the idea or the means to try to do otherwise ? Although the majority of the population of these countries is under 25, they are far less independent in their ways of thinking and acting, and have far less in the way of available means, than young Europeans or North Americans.

As we travel across Latin America like this, we are constantly struck by the realisation of the extraordinarily privileged situation that Western Europe at present enjoys — having at one and the same time economic prosperity, political freedom, relative social peace and all that without a war on its hands. With the possible exception of Japan, I can see no other part of the world where all those conditions coincide. Not in Latin America, in any case.

« Awake, you who are sleeping, rise from the dead, and Christ will be your light » (Eph. 5).

Perhaps such love may cost us our life : are we waking up to live Christ for men ?

How shall we shake off the oppression of heavy sleep — today, not tomorrow ?

We cannot stay behind in the rear-guards of humanity with all their fruitless struggles. We cannot let ourselves be immobilised or alienated there.

« Rise from the dead, and Christ will be your light ».

God : too resplendant to be looked on, God is a God who blinds. Christ restrains that devouring fire and, without splendour, lets God appear.

Christ is there, present to each of us, whether we know him or not... then the first way for us to serve, surely, is for us to be for each person a revealer of that presence of Christ ?

He is there secretly, brightness in our night ; he burns the very heart of men.

And at the same time is not Christ, risen from among the dead, like God : other than ourselves ? Then he becomes the companion of man's untiring search to see him face to face. He is ahead of man, beyond man.

It is only then, and not otherwise, that in this encounter filled with the silences of God we begin to apprehend something unique : mankind's contemplative calling.

To seize the depths of Christ, and in turn to be seized, implies losing our life in order to save it in him.

It involves nothing less than the gift of our whole life to a calling of love. And that, without fail, leads to prayer : those tiny constancies, the ground beneath our knees, poor stutterings.

So then let us rise from the dead : Christ awaits us.

The day will come when, in him, will be fulfilled all created worlds, some of them perhaps with other creatures made in the image of God living in them. If such a new fulness of communion were to become manifest, beyond what we can perceive today, its source would always lie in the one and the same Christ. The body of Christ, his Church, can only ever expand toward the dimension of the whole universe.

« Arise from the dead » and let your heart burst forth in a communion : hasten, from one end of the earth to the other if needs be, towards the man who is despised, scorned, rejected ; hasten towards the man who sees more clearly because of his struggles for victims of oppression. Like God, man creates and with the risen Lord the christian pursues an interior adventure : each day he transfigures man and mankind.

That creative freedom is ours to enter, we know where to find the recklessness, and the source to quench our thirsts : Christ is risen.

(Meditation ; B. Roger — Easter Day 1972)

Easter at Puerto Rico

It is not easy to be a traveller ; it is not so obvious in fact, to have to meet so many people, to share a hope and then to leave straight away ; living nothing more than the strength of an encounter, listening... This evening we have prayed together, assembled as a cell after a hard day of meeting people all over the island. Our prayer together formed essential links with those who, at Taizé and elsewhere, were together to celebrate the Resurrection of Christ. Across the ocean we were united with you all. Underlying all our life as a cell there was the essential need to interiorise, to pray, the need to meet together at certain moments and to stop everything else. We are very diversified in the cell and it is by accepting to carry that within us that we advance together (the cell was formed of young people from the States, Canada, and Europe).

Our celebration of Easter was so beautiful, with many young workers. The new fire was blessed at the top of a hill, then a procession to a circular clearing around an old tree with all its roots exposed, one of us danced the Resurrection, we sang (...).

IN ASIA, IN AFRICA, SEARCHING...

Signs of contradiction where men are poorest

Manilla (Philippines) — *Everywhere that we go, we are told of a new awakening among young people in the last two, three or four years. It involves great demands that lead some to commit their whole lives to the service of the poor, to the search for a Church that is poorer, more open... It seems to have begun at about the same time in many places and to be irreversible ; this means that not everybody now consents to injustices, and that is a tendency that is rapidly growing.*

Bujumbura (Burundi) — One sign of the times : a certain African government prefers to have technical advisors

from China, because they accept simple living conditions whilst westerners demand air-conditioning, comfort and high wages. It almost seems as though we, being rich, may be unable to help the poorer countries develop. Certainly, we know how to build things. But what about helping persons ? One attitude that may apparently help the people of Africa develop, economically and in human terms, lies in asking, before appealing for outside assistance, « *With our own means, what can we accomplish on our own ? What can we fight against for ourselves ?* » The demand is always to go faster, which means always wanting to use big means. But I wonder if, in acting in this way, there has not often been a neglect of the ressources that each person carries within himself, the « poor means » (mutual trust, availability, attention to others, receptivity, responsibility, solidarity) ? Before that kind of material can be brought into action, men have first to become aware of it, in a kind of inner conversion.

Philippines — *One of the young people we met here was wondering, looking at the Philippines situation (widespread corruption, enormous differences between rich and poor, every kind of injustice) if it was best or not to stay within the system : to act from within (slowly and with difficulty) or amongst the people, outside of the system, even going to the extreme of violent revolution. His idea was that the two options could not stand in isolation — the two together (action at the levels of governing classes and poor classes) might lead to a result, as long as there was mutual support, knowledge of one another and common action. It is sad to see that the young people here, all with one basic drive — to reduce the distance between rich and poor — are almost fighting among themselves about questions of ideology and method. Simply because they are all refering to ideas that are outside of themselves, rarely in their hearts. The preparation of the Council of Youth can be the start of a link between them all, since it connects action and the inner realities of man, and that is at present unknown here.*

Kampala (Uganda) — For a bishop we have just been talking to, the preparation of the Council of Youth represents « a sign of a new period of humanity, the period of the search for man. Not what he can achieve or project, but the search for the secret that makes us men, human persons. It is as though, after so many technological and scientific successes, we are suddenly thrown back on ourselves ; and here we are, ignorant of ourselves, without any answers. We shall never move ahead, unless we can receive in us, in each one of us, the living God. Then, suddenly, we are delivered from fear and made capable of great things, our limits are broken down. Youth will get something done if they grasp that and are ready to die for what they are convinced of ». I am wondering how to connect what we are living together here with the building up of the future : perhaps the only way is in a radical choice of poverty.

Manilla — *The young people here talk very openly with one another. At one meeting there were some who based themselves on the Bible and others inspired by Mao. Perhaps this openess does not change anything much ; but it is already a step towards reconciliation. Meeting those who are very activist, you wonder where love has gone : 'fight for' or 'fight against', but it seems that there is very little love for one's companions in the struggle. Perhaps the presence of young christians in this kind of political action may bring a change of spirit. But won't they soon run out of breath if they are not backed up by a Church that they love and respect, in spite of everything, in spite of its failings ?*

Lomié (South Cameroun) — Last Saturday I spent a day and a night at the pygmie camp at Abahoum. I felt that I had to attempt that if there was to be any advance in our friendship...

The term « sign of contradiction » is not an easy one, because contradiction taken in a wrong sense or badly controlled can lead to misunderstandings, and even to

hatred. Let the person who becomes a sign of contradiction remain humble so as to accept his own transformation, to really forgive and to have hope in the others — in those others for whom he may have become a contradiction. Here, we are constantly in contradiction. For instance, our group here at Lomié by its way of living contradicts certain habits of easy living, disturbs the comfortably settled-down position of the traditional mission here. We allow ourselves to express other ideas and to have a different order of priorities : welcome, service... The consequence is that there are criticisms, condemnations, hurts, lack of understanding. None of that gets anywhere and I really have had to fight against letting myself fall into a feeling of hatred towards this mission — we disagree so completely. But in that case, what sign of the Gospel would we give ? Is it really the spirit of the risen Christ, when we are driven to hit out against one another ?

Negros Island (Philippines) — *With the support of a bishop, a cooperative of small plantation owners has been set up. He is very welcoming, and we have been talking with him about the problems of growing sugar-cane. He is trying to be a man of reconciliation, and to his table come workers, bankers and land owners.*

We have been two days in a village with a group of young people who are trying to encourage a community spirit among a group of former sugar-cane workers ; by means of a strike, they have managed to make the haciendero*s give them land to cultivate. They have just arrived. They have to build their house ; they also have to plough the land, an undertaking which is new to them since they are only used to cutting sugar-cane. Sitting in the village in the evening, they tell us of their many problems. Life is hard for all. There are some who would rather go back to the plantation, where they are sure of getting their 4 pesos every evening. Here, they will have to hold on until the first harvest in a few months' time, when things will get better. The question is : will they have the patience ?*

Sharing and discovering

Douala (Cameroun) — Two cells travelling in Western and Central Africa met, togther with young people from the Cameroun, to celebrate Easter at Douala. They spent several days together, praying and reflecting :

— In what way do we think and act, and by what attitudes do we show our racism and tribalism ?

— In every stranger we meet, whoever he be, there are values and riches. How do we discover them, what are they ?

— What does the risen Christ add to the struggle against racism and tribalism ?

— What can we do, as christians and as cells preparing the Council of Youth, to struggle here and now against racism and tribalism ?

Nairobi (Kenya) — *One girl has been telling me about tribalism here. Once she had found work, her family put so much pressure on her that she had to find work for other relatives. She is completely against tribalism, but if she gives a job to someone from another tribe (choosing the person best suited for the job) then her family and tribe will reject her. Someone else talked of the enormous need for reconciliation between tribes and clans. He quoted the example of a meeting that lasted from 11am to 6pm because, following the custom, each person must express himself, until everyone is in agreement. It is necessary to await a consensus of opinion, not just a majority. And at the end one of the chiefs present told him that if his presence, that of a stranger, had not acted as a catalyst, they would have simply quarrelled, instead of looking for an agreement.*

Java (Indonesia) — If there are christians and moslems working together, it is principally because their immediate preoccupations are the same, and not because of their faith — about which they never talk among themselves. They were all very interested by the preparation

of the Council of Youth. To begin with there was some hesitation about the text of the « joyful news », but when it was explained that it is there to be a source, demanding of each one to be true in his commitment and his faith, in a spirit of openess and of being attentive to others so as better to understand them, then they understood ; from there they explained to us how they were struggling for greater justice. Because of all the work they are doing, several have been arrested by the police.

Kampala (Uganda) — *Tomorrow morning we will have been in Africa for three months ; a time of astonishment and admiration, of enrichment and joy but also of tensions and despair. Every day we are facing the problem of being three Europeans, burdened with history and privileges and I feel very strongly that people look at us with suspicion and fear. Our attitude must be one of listening and humility.*

Lomé (Togoland) — We have found somewhere to stay : two rooms on a courtyard with other African families. There is no electricity or running water, our water comes from the well. To cook, we use a little charcoal stove — our neighbours help. We have been living here for five days now, and not once have we been left to eat alone. Each meal is shared with others, Togo-style. We find that we have to struggle if we are not going to be served by the others : every time we go to draw water, the children and even the adults from the courtyard run up to do it for us ; they offer to help carry anything at all heavy ; we are offered armchairs when we go to visit, while the host takes a stool or a small chair. And it really is so important not to fall into too easygoing a way of life ! Last Sunday, we arrived late at the Mass, so that we were standing at the back of the church. And, to us « yovos » (whites), people brought chairs. We refused them, inviting the mothers with children in their arms to take them. That evening, Daniel and a friend came to visit us. The friend had been at church that morning and had come to tell us how much astonishment our attitude had caused... and how good it had been !

Kampala — *It is depressing to see that most of the young people here are fixing their lives on values we — in the northern hemisphere — are dropping, values such as a good position, money, security in conventions and organisations, and personal achievement. One young Ugandan said during a meeting the other day,* « we aren't adventurous enough and neglect the impact youth can have. Mostly, christians are 'sleeping in Christ' and don't see Christ as a challenge for full commitment, questioning and criticism. Only if the young people start at the very bottom, changing their mentality, and refusing apathy, then the Church might change and be a place of visible communion for all humanity ».

Hong-Kong — Last Sunday about fifty of us met together, young workers for the most part, both protestant and catholic. Apparently ecumenical encounters among youth are quite unusual here. The theme was 'joy'. We found certain difficulties : language (part of the meeting in Chinese, part in English), reticence about sharing very personal experiences, a certain distrust of those who were strangers only a few hours before...

Lomé — *A boy asked us « is it true that there are poor people in Europe too ? » Before trying to reply, we asked what he reckoned. This is his reply :* « In Europe there must be more unfortunate people than here. Because in our country if a brother is hungry, even though we have little to eat we share with him ; if he has nowhere to go, he lives with us ; if he has nothing to wear, we clothe him... The poor is never on his own, never left to himself. »

Information on the next meetings at Taizé :
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